

# YOBL

## Year of Biblical Literacy

### Week 36: Jesus as Israel

#### Daily Reading for Week

- Matthew 17-18, Psalm 89
- Matthew 19-20, Psalm 90
- Matthew 21-22, Psalm 91
- Matthew 23-24, Psalm 92
- Matthew 25-26, Psalm 93
- Matthew 27-28, Psalm 94
- Mark 1-2, Psalm 95
- Read Scripture Video: [Matthew 14-28, also rewatch Matthew 1-13 and Deuteronomy](#)

#### Focus of time together

To see how Matthew's Gospel presents Jesus as an embodied representation of Israel, who brings about the end of exile and becomes the true embodiment of what Israel was supposed to be.

#### Connecting Exercise

What is your favourite story about Jesus that you have read so far?

#### Opening Prayer

Have someone open your time in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal new and layers to the stories of Jesus you will read together.

#### Intro to Discussion

Last week in our YOBL readings, we began the New Testament. For many, this is the part of the Bible we are most familiar with. We discovered that, far from being removed from the Old Testament and Israel's story, the New Testament is actually written almost entirely using the language of the Jewish Scriptures. Particularly in the Gospels, almost every line and verse contains allusions and echoes of the Old Testament.

This week, we will look at two passages near the beginning of Matthew's Gospel that specifically and intentionally tie Jesus to Israel's story. Matthew, perhaps more explicitly than any other New Testament writer, suggests that Jesus embodies Israel's story in Himself, and also that, in Jesus, Israel's story has reached its climax. From the very beginning of the genealogy, Matthew begins his Gospel by tying Jesus to Genesis

(“*This is the genealogy of Jesus*” [in Greek, literally “the book of the genesis of Jesus”]). He also ties Jesus to Abraham, King David, and the exile. Basically, the entirety of Israel’s history is written into Jesus’ bloodline! Before we begin reading, here are a few notes on each passage:

**A) Matthew 2:13-18:** This section from Matthew’s birth narrative quotes Hosea 11 and Jeremiah 31 explicitly but also has echoes of the Exodus story, with Jesus as Israel (notice God’s description of Israel in Exodus 4 as “my firstborn son”). The Hosea and Jeremiah passages were written to Israel during their exile. Both passages hint at the pain of exile as well as the hope of God ending Israel’s exile and establishing them as a flourishing kingdom again. Both passages contain the reminder that, as Richard Hayes puts it, “violence and exile do not have the final word, for God’s love for Israel will prevail and bring about restoration.” Matthew, by including these quotations and echoes, is suggesting both that, in Jesus, Israel will experience a redemption similar to the Exodus AND that Jesus’ birth signals the potential and long-hoped-for end of Israel’s exile.

**B) Matthew 4:1-11:** In this account of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness by the devil, Jesus responds three times with a quote from Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is a book that records Moses’ final speeches to Israel just as their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness are ending and they are about to enter the Promised Land. In Deuteronomy, Moses exhorts Israel to be obedient and faithful to the Law and covenant which Yahweh has given them. As the Old Testament goes on to make abundantly clear, Israel failed to be faithful and obedient, so they eventually fell under God’s judgement by being taken away into exile. In Matthew 4:1-11, Matthew portrays Jesus as a figurative representation of both Moses and Israel. Like Moses, Jesus will lead Israel out of the wilderness, into covenant faithfulness, and the promise land. Like Israel, Jesus is tempted at the end of his time in the wilderness, but UNLIKE Israel, Jesus emerges as the perfectly faithful son who obeys God and embodies Israel as they were meant to be. Jesus fulfills Israel’s intended destiny.

## **Whole Group Discussion (60 minutes)**

### **SECTION 1- 30 MINUTES**

#### **Questions for Basic Understanding**

*These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.*

#### **Read Matthew 2:13-18**

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had

said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

"A voice is heard in Ramah,  
weeping and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more."

1. Out of all the Gospel writers, Matthew is the only one who includes this story of Jesus' childhood escape to Egypt. Why do you think Matthew included it?

## Questions for Interacting with Scripture

*These questions are to help us slow down, to taste and notice Scripture, savour its richness and meditate on its complexity of meaning.*

In Matthew's narrative of Jesus' childhood, he quotes from the prophets Hosea and Jeremiah and also alludes to Exodus. Specifically, Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1 and Jeremiah 31:15 are referenced. The literary intention of these references is not only to draw from those few specific verses but also to invite us to consider the meaning of the entire passage from which they come. Therefore, we will go back and read not only the verses quoted, but the longer sections of Scripture they are from. As you read, try to recall the point of these passages as well as the significance of the words quoted.

### Read Exodus 4:22-23

Then say to Pharaoh, "This is what the Lord says: *Israel is my firstborn son*, and I told you, ' *Let my son go*, so he may worship me.' But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son."

### Read Hosea 11:1-11

*"When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.*

But the more they were called,  
the more they went away from me.

They sacrificed to the Baals  
and they burned incense to images.

It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
taking them by the arms;

but they did not realise  
it was I who healed them.

I led them with cords of human kindness,  
with ties of love.

To them I was like one who lifts

a little child to the cheek,  
and I bent down to feed them.  
“Will they not return to Egypt  
and will not Assyria rule over them  
because they refuse to repent?  
A sword will flash in their cities;  
it will devour their false prophets  
and put an end to their plans.  
My people are determined to turn from me.  
Even though they call me God Most High,  
I will by no means exalt them.  
“How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I hand you over, Israel?  
How can I treat you like Admah?  
How can I make you like Zeboyim?  
My heart is changed within me;  
all my compassion is aroused.  
I will not carry out my fierce anger,  
nor will I devastate Ephraim again.  
For I am God, and not a man—  
the Holy One among you.  
I will not come against their cities.  
They will follow the Lord;  
he will roar like a lion.  
When he roars,  
his children will come trembling from the west.  
They will come from Egypt,  
trembling like sparrows,  
from Assyria, fluttering like doves.  
I will settle them in their homes,”  
declares the Lord.

**Read Jeremiah 31:15-17**

This is what the Lord says:

*“A voice is heard in Ramah,  
mourning and great weeping,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more.”*

This is what the Lord says:

“Restrain your voice from weeping  
and your eyes from tears,  
for your work will be rewarded,”  
declares the Lord.

“They will return from the land of the enemy.

*So there is hope for your descendants,”*  
declares the Lord.  
*“Your children will return to their own land.”*

### **Now reread Matthew 2:13-18 once more**

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and *escape to Egypt*. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and *left for Egypt*, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “*Out of Egypt I called my son.*”

When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

*“A voice is heard in Ramah,  
weeping and great mourning,  
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and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more.”*

1. How does reading the corresponding Old Testament texts above change your understanding of the passage in Matthew?
2. By including these Old Testament allusions, what point is Matthew is making about Jesus?
3. As we said, Matthew’s intention in quoting Jeremiah and Hosea is to make a literary nod to the entire passages which he is quoting from. Though the verses explicitly quoted don’t sound very hopeful, both Jeremiah 31 and Hosea 11 are hopeful encouragements to Israel that God will one day deliver them from exile. Considering this, how do Matthew’s references hint at the mission of Jesus?

## **SECTION 2 - 30 MINUTES**

### **Questions for Basic Understanding**

*These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.*

#### **Read Matthew 4:1-11**

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you,  
and they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

1. Upon initial reading of this story, what stands out to you?

## Questions for Interacting with Scripture

*These questions are to help us slow down, to taste and notice Scripture, savour its richness and meditate on its complexity of meaning.*

### Read Deuteronomy 9:25-26

I (Moses) lay prostrate before the Lord *those forty days and forty nights* because the Lord had said he would destroy you. I prayed to the Lord and said, “Sovereign Lord, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance that you redeemed by your great power and brought *out of Egypt with a mighty hand*.”

### Read Deuteronomy 8:2-3

Remember how the Lord your God *led you all the way in the wilderness* these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, *causing you to hunger* and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that *man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*.

### Read Deuteronomy 6:16-18

*Do not put the Lord your God to the test* as you did at Massah. Be sure to *keep the commands of the Lord your God* and the stipulations and decrees he has given you. Do what is right and good in the Lord’s sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors,

### Read Deuteronomy 6:13

Fear the Lord your God, *serve him only* and take your oaths in his name.

### Now reread Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was *led by the Spirit into the wilderness* to be tempted by the devil. After *fasting forty days and forty nights*, he was *hungry*. The tempter came to him

and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: '*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

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Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: '*Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.*'"

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

1. How does Jesus in this wilderness temptation story embody the covenant faithfulness which Israel was meant to live out?
2. Matthew represents Jesus as the obedient son which Israel was supposed to be. Why is that significant? Specifically, what did Jesus succeed in doing that Israel failed to do?
3. In this wilderness temptation story, Matthew's language suggests both that Jesus is embodying Israel (especially Deuteronomy 8:2-3) and Israel's leader, Moses (Deuteronomy 9:25-26). What does this connection to Moses tell us about Jesus' authority as true Israel's true leader?

## **Closing Prayer**

Pray for one another, asking the Holy Spirit for humility, wisdom, and joy as you read the stories of Jesus over the next few weeks.